

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES – SUMMER 2024

### 7. Fasting

Fasting is a discipline that is not practiced very often in our society and is not understood that well either. Fasting is biblical and is assumed as a necessary spiritual discipline by Jesus. He taught His disciples, *When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting* (Matthew 6:16). Note that He said: *When you fast...* and not “If you fast.”

The primary purpose of fasting is described best by Ezra: *I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions* (Ezra 8:21). Fasting necessarily causes us to humble ourselves and to focus on God and His guidance, direction, and protection. Fasting can be a way to gain greater clarity from God on an important decision we have to make. We should pray through any cravings we experience while fasting.

There are three kinds of fasts: the normal fast, the partial fast, and the absolute fast. The normal fast is when we abstain from all food and only drink water. The partial fast is when we abstain from certain foods or drinks. The absolute fast is when we abstain from both food and drink. Obviously, for health reasons, most today do not enter an absolute fast, but we find this type of fast called for in Ezra 10:6, Esther 4:16, and Acts 9:9.

There is nothing in Scripture that mandates fasting for a specific period of time. Normal and partial fasts can last anywhere from several hours to several days, weeks, or even months. Many in the Christian faith participate in Lent, which is a tradition of prayer and fasting for forty days leading up to Easter. The forty days represent the forty days and nights Jesus fasted during his time in the wilderness, where Satan tempted him (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). While this activity is not mandated in Scripture, fasting during Lent is an appropriate motivation for tangible sacrifice leading up to the most holy event of the Christian calendar, Easter.

Here are some questions for further reflection:

1. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate yourself on this Spiritual Discipline?
2. What specific actions will you take to develop this Spiritual Discipline further?
3. Read the passages surrounding the verses referenced above and meditate on the Scriptural truths present in those passages.
4. Choose a verse to memorize this week.

***Living and Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!***